

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 2, February 2019

www.ijellh.com

Asya Shahanaz. K

English Faculty,

DGMMES Mampad College,

Mampad, Kerala, India

shahanazfazal@gmail.com

**Lacanian Paradigm of Thread Memory: An attempt of paradigmatic approach in the
Works of Salman Rushdie**

Abstract: Psychoanalysis is the most debated theory in the literature criticism, and that is still on air. Psychoanalysis explores the complexities of the human soul. It is widely believed that there is a close connection between literature and psychoanalysis. The current study will analyze Lacanian notion of memory in the selected works of Sulman Rushdie. The paper examines the way memory shapes the behavior, personality and attitude of any individual. It traces the underlined pinnings of psychoanalytic theory, with the special focus on Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan through the notion of Lacan, the study will analyze the main characters from the selected novels. The paper clearly provides a clear overview of the psychoanalysis, the key definitions related to the theory of psychoanalysis and the key concepts of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The mental working of the characters along with the instances are analyzed and understood here. Memory is the way in which an individual receives, stores and comprehends the information. Through the characters the study tries to show the genuine status the memory plays in human life. The current study will review the existing papers on the concept of memory. Besides, the study reviews the characters of the novel to determine how the child hood and memories shaped the personality of becoming an adult. The paper stresses on the importance of language and communication

in shaping an individual's memory, exploring Lacanian psychoanalysis. The study found out that memory is a constant interaction between the conscious and unconscious mind. After deeper analysis of the characters the study concluded that memory definitely plays a major role in defining the behavior of an adult brain. The study observed that memory remembers anything happening in our life and is recalled later in the future. Thus, memory is a kind of journey towards self-discovery and self-realization.

Keywords: behavior, language, literature, memory, personality, psychoanalysis.

1. Introduction

Psychoanalysis is a general term applied for both the treatment of mental disorders and the set of psychoanalytic theories. It is the process of emphasizing unconscious and considers it as the essential factor in the adaptation of the human behaviour. In this process of psychoanalysis, all the pent up or repressed emotions and the memories hidden in the human mind leads to catharsis. The theory of psychoanalysis is the most influential and controversial theories of twentieth century, a theory developed by an Austrian psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, It was Freud who coined the term psychoanalysis which later developed as a technique to treat emotional disorders. According to McLeod, psychoanalysis is a therapy that aims to release all the pent up or repressed emotions or memories. In other words, psychoanalysis is a way of bringing the unconscious to the conscious (2014).

Psychoanalysis is a school of psychology dealing with the childhood experiences moulding the behaviour of an adult. It also concentrates on the role of subconscious in determining the human behaviour and personality. Freud always believed that childhood will exert a greater influence on the adult personality and behaviour. Based on the observations recorded, Freud

recorded and differentiated three functionalities happening within the mind namely Id, Ego and Superego. The strong interplay between these determines the actions and is central to the abnormality in psychoanalysis (Lauren, 2017).

The three important layers developed by Freud are conscious, where the current thoughts, feelings live; preconscious/ subconscious, where memories can be recalled and retrieved; and unconscious, where the deepest desires reside. Later, Freud structured the model of the mind which co-exist with the ideas of consciousness and unconsciousness. The three parts namely Id, Ego and Super-ego in terms of whose activity our mental life is described. Id entirely at the unconscious level focuses on instant desires, whereas ego acts as a bridge to fill the gap between id and superego. Superego is the portion of the mind with full of morality and higher principles.

Later in to the mid-1900s, Jacques Lacan, the French psychologist reconceptualized Freud providing a new dimension to the theory of psychoanalysis. Lacan focused on the language aspects of the human mind. A structuralist view of psychoanalysis by Lacan suggested that language is an important piece in the development of human behaviour. The three key concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis are - The Real, Symbolic, and Mirror Stage (Malone, 2000).

Particularly speaking of the memory in psychoanalysis, Lacan uses it in two different contexts. According to Lacan, memory is identified as a symbolic order linked to the post-structuralist view. Here the theory is related with the concepts of recollection and remembrance entirely different from imagination. Besides Lacan is of the opinion that memory is not biological but psychological, where in the chain of signifiers and signified are interlinked with the concept of signifying articulation. Thus, Lacan viewed that the layer of unconscious as explained by Freud is memory.

Memory is identified by the way in which information is encoded, stored and retrieved. The process of encoding is sensing the outside world or information with the help of physical stimuli. At this stage the information collected will be changed in order to store it in the mind. Thus, storing is the second stage in memory. And the third process is retrieving the information that has been stored. Thus retrieval of memory has three stages Encoding or registration: receiving, processing and combining of received information; Storage: creation of a permanent record of the encoded information in short term or long term memory; Retrieval, recall or recollection: calling back the stored information in response to some cue for use in a process or activity. The loss of memory is described as forgetfulness or amnesia (Shepardson, 1993).

Thus, the current research paper will discuss how memory shapes the human behaviour and personality in the works of Salman Rushdie. The study will look into the definition of memory, with special focus on Lacanian concepts of psychoanalysis. A clear outline of psychoanalysis will be provided to understand the way in which human behaviour and personality is shaped. Apart from this, the paper will discuss the way the characters mind and the memory functions and shapes their personality. The study will analyse the role of memory in the selected novels of Salman Rushdie and explores the human psyche of the protagonists in terms of the language.

2. Theory of Psychoanalysis

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has brought in radical change to the treatment of abnormal behaviour in human life. He believed that human possess certain inner instincts like desire or need to satisfy one's own needs. The source of satisfaction depends on the pleasure principle as explained by Freud in the theory of psychoanalysis. To Freud, sex plays a key role in forming the adult personality and behaviour, where the source of pleasure is understood as

sexual. The focus of psychoanalytic approach is solely on the unconscious mind rather than the conscious mind. The basic foundational idea is that the past experiences lodged in the unconscious mind will determine the behaviour and personality of an adult (Positive Psychology, n.d.).

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic approach to psychology, concentrated on the influence of the unconscious mind on the behaviour. It is widely accepted that human mind is composed of three elements - id, ego and superego. Moreover, the theories of psychosexual stages, the unconscious and interpretation of dream remain as the part of psychology culture. Thus, Freud's theories changed the way in which people think about the human mind and behaviour. This also explores the impulses hidden in the human unconscious mind. Some of the important theorists of psychoanalysis apart from Freud are Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan. Psychoanalytic approach to literature rests on the theories of Sigmund Freud as they directly or indirectly will discuss the working of human unconscious mind (Pun, 2018). Lacanian psychoanalysis is an attempt to integrate Freudian psychoanalysis with post-structuralism. It is reviewed as revolutionary to Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. According to Lacan, language is the most essential of human civilization.

3. Tracing Memory: Analysing the protagonists of the novels 'The Midnight's Children' and 'The Golden House'

Salman Rushdie is one of the most prominent diasporic writers in Indian English Literature. The novels of Rushdie deal with the historical and philosophical issues with surreal characters, brooding humour and an effusive melodramatic style. *Midnight's Children* is the novel of response to the series of real life situations cleverly fictionalized in allusions.

The novel discusses the events and experiences in the lives of three generations of the Sinai family. The story of the novel centres around a young boy born exactly when the midnight clock stroke at 12 on August 14, 1947. Salman Rushdie tried to create a fictional biography of the country from the view of someone who is away from the nation.

The entire novel discusses the life, personality and career of Saleem. Also the novel tells the story of modern India, Todd Giles remarks that “Midnight’s Children is an exercise in the act of archivization, a gathering of impressions, exteriorizing of memories from the private to the public realm” (Giles, 182). Rushdie presents Saleem as one of the finest India’s National Memory wherein the protagonist himself narrates “I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me” (Rushdie 440). Therefore, Rushdie tried to list out who Saleem is, everything around him, even the whole Indian history.

Memory plays a very important role in defining the personality and behaviour of the characters. Here, in the novel, Saleem seems to have a dual character. As he was born at midnight on the eve of Independence, he tends to have a divided character and he himself becomes the part of India’s history. Saleem as a child is always compared with another nametag Shive who was also born on the same day. His sufferings almost began soon after the birth, where he remembers the loss of guilt and identity. In the novel, Saleem is portrayed as a person who comes from the background of East and West which causes dilemma in his life from the moment of his birth. Saleem having two mothers and numerous fathers remarked that, “I have had more mothers than most mothers have children” (243). Another line from the novel clearly observes how important memory in determining the personality of the adult Saleem is. Here are the exact words of Saleem, ‘all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers’ (426). Another line from the novel goes ‘giving

birth to parents have been one of my strange talents' (243). There are several more instances in the novel where memory defines the character of the characters in the novel.

While Rushdie's latest novel The Golden House deals with an unstable family which moves from Bombay, heart of India to the West. The story showcases the extreme reality of life which can be considered as a satire. According to Taunton, despite being a satire, The Golden House is also an Elegy of many things like decency and privacy (2017). Mukherjee states, "In the Golden House, Salman Rushdie shifts from magic realism, choosing realistic elements over the fantastical and hallucination elements'" (2019). Thus, the novel deals with the life of United States, the actual events of America in recent years are recorded in the story which gives a realistic outlook. It is believed that the book is set in the real contemporary world. The Golden House in a sense is the story of father and the three sons dealing with the question of gender identity and political issues.

As the novel is the picturesque of real events, memory certainly has a crucial role in the honest characterization of the characters. Memory is usually held with hallucination and imagination, which provides evidence in the midst of securing the knowledge. The narrator of the novel recalls and recounts the excellent introduction of the guests as, 'That night he talked and drank without stopping, and all of us who were there would carry fragments of that talk in our memories for the rest of our lives. What crazy, extraordinary talk it was! No limit to the subjects he reached for and used as punching bags' (Mukherjee, 1). The above quoted lines clearly sketch the immediate drawing of the knowledge from the repertoire of the knowledge stored in the human brains.

3.1 Notion of Memory in ‘The Midnight’s Children’ and ‘the Golden House’

Memory is the continuous interaction between conscious mind and unconscious mind. It is human nature to remember the things performed consciously while the hidden or repressed needs or desires; the things which lead to stress and anxiety are ultimately discharged in to the id. Nevertheless, memory helps in shaping out the personality and behaviour of an adult.

In *The Midnight’s Children*, several clues are provided to claim that the central character exhibits a divided character explained in terms of psychoanalysis. Saleem being the central character of the novel recalls all his sufferings from his childhood. Although grown up as an adult, Saleem faces problems and a numerous personal mutilations. He becomes the subject of hallucination where in the narrator starts hearing unheard voices as soon as his father gives him a blow on the face.

The disfigured face of Salim distinguishes him from other students in the school leaving a permanent mark in his memory leading to a traumatic situation. During the emergency period, Saleem is castrated leaving him impotent.

Saleem claims to be a Buddha. Initially, he declares it as a “fortunate ambiguity of transliteration!” Later, however, he explains that “once upon a time, a prince, unable to bear the suffering of the world, became capable of not-living-in-the-world as well as living in it; he was present, but also absent; his body was in one place, but his spirit was elsewhere” (p.349-50). Saleem too manages to live both within/outside the world simultaneously. “Like Gautama, the first and true Buddha, I left my life and comfort and went like a beggar into the world” (p.397). If these lines are carefully read, one can notice confusions created inside the internal memory of the protagonists.

Although the novel is highly a political allegory, painful and tragic reconciliations are also embedded in the literary work. The novel illustrates the permanent plight, troubles, sufferings and sorrows of the individuals living in the hostile and devastative modern world. Besides the

novel is the journey of Saleem and Aziz, where in the characters are accustomed to self-realization and self-transcendence. In other words, it is the story of self-discovery and the strugglesome route of self-realization (Abu Baker, 2007).

Rushdie in the novel quotes, “Memory is truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own.”(242).These lines explain how memory categorizes the events happening in the life of individuals like in the life of the protagonists.

A deeper analysis of the novel The Golden House declared that it is the tale of great wealth and great downfall in American reality. The novel is said to be a panorama of contemporary politics and culture in America. The novel discloses the current American culture leaving the magical elements and returning to realism. The story of the novel is but the father and the three sons-Petya, Apu and Nero. The first son Petya is different from normal humans as he is highly distressed from autism. Although distinct, Petya is intelligent who spends time in the bathroom for hours under the blue light. His conversations always had a painful suffering Starred Publishers Weekly Review stated, the novel is “Ambitious and rewarding... Replete with allusions to literature, film, mythology and politics, the novel simultaneously channels the calamities of Greek drama and the information overload of the internet. The result is a distinctively rich epic of the immigrant experience in modern America, where no amount of money or self-abnegation can truly free a family from the sins of the past.” (2).

4. Findings and Discussion

The current study analyzed and discussed the two important novels of Salman Rushdie, discovering the role memory plays on the lives of the individuals. The protagonists of the

novels underwent several sufferings and the influences can be observed in the personality of the protagonists. It is found that memory is a sort of unconscious mind and it is proved that the unconscious mind remembers all the events happened in their entire life and are recalled later in journey of self-discovery and self-realization. From the study it is understood that memory takes the help of language or the communication system, as put forward by Lacan. To him, memory is the symbolic history consisting of signifiers and signified. Therefore, language is important in the transcription or translation of the feelings hidden in the unconscious mind.

5. Conclusion

The ongoing study explored the notion of memory in the two selected novels of Salman Rushdie- The Midnight's Children and The Golden House. Primary focus of the study was to find out the relation between memory and language. The way language is used to transfer the emotions, feelings, and plight are laid focus to conclude that language is the prominent factor translating the memory and mind of the characters in the novel. It can be concluded from the instances cited in the study that memory is not biological but psychological as marked by Lacan in the theory of psychoanalysis.

References

- Abu Baker, Ahmad. (2007). Identity and Erasure‘ in Salman Rushdie‘s Midnight’s Children. Panjab University Research Journal (Arts). V. XXXIV. 79-98
- D. Taylor (1938) Realism and memory, Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, 16:3, 218-232,DOI: 10.1080/00048403808541115
- Freud, Sigmund. An outline of psycho-analysis. WW Norton & Company, 1989.
- Giles, Todd. “Writing And ChutnificationIn Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children.” Explicator 65.3 (2007): 182-185. Literary Reference Center. Web. 27 Mar. 2014. Park, H. Y. 2011 Shared national memory as intangible heritage, Annals of Tourism Research, 38(2): 520-539.
- Lipner, Lauren & Mendelsohn, Robert & Muran, John. (2017). Psychoanalysis. 10.4135/9781483365817.n1084.
- Malathi, S. Diasporic Schizophrenia reflected in the characters of Midnight’s Children. International Multidisciplinary Innovative Research Journal.1(1), 2016 [1-6]
- Malone, Karen. (2000). Lacan and Psychological Theory.
- McLeod, Saul. What are the most interesting ideas of Sigmund Freud?.Simply Psychology, 2018.
- Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Sigmund-Freud.html>
- Mukherjee, Oindrila. Salman Rushdie’s new novel abandons magical realism to become a political suspense thriller. Scroll.in. January 13. 2019.
- Parmar, Prabha. "LANGUAGE IN INDIA."
- Pun, Min. The Interpretation of the Unconscious: From Freud to Lacan. International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. 2018. 7(1). Pp.48-52
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's children*. Random House, 2010.

Shepherdson, Charles. "Vital Signs: The" Place" of Memory in Psychoanalysis." Research in Phenomenology (1993): 22-72.

Taunton, Paul. Salman Rushdie's The Golden House suggests names might be the mother of reinvention, National Post. September 15, 2017 2:56 PM EDT.